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ABSTRACT

Early childhood music programs should be based on two interacting goals: (1) to teach those skills most appropriate to a particular level and (2) to nurture musical creativity and self-expression. Early childhood is seen as the optimum time for acquiring certain musical skills, of which the ability to sing in tune is considered primary. The vocal productions of young children are grouped into two broad categories: the group chant and the private song. Children are to be encouraged to sing freely (not only at scheduled times), to share their songs with others and to listen to certain types of contemporary and primitive music which have musical characteristics similar to their own songs. The Kodaly method for sequential vocal development is described, and the importance of developing aural perceptiveness is stressed. The focus of the music program should be to nurture music as a creative, self-expressive medium with technical help in skill development secondary. Development of a classroom music center with a variety of instruments is described. Group activities suggested include: experimentation with varying instrumental tone colors; "aural walks" in field, street and schoolyard; experiments with materials such as paper or water; rhythmic improvisations based on ordinary physical activities; and imitation of compositional devices heard on records. (BF)

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Parallel Goals of the Early Childhood Music Program

A Workshop given at the Fine Arts — Early Childhood Conference October 1974

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When I recently asked some college students the question, "Why teach music in early childhood classes?", many answers were given: it will make the child healthy, well-adjusted, sociable, intelligent. I wish to make no such grand claims. I see two very basic reasons for the teaching of music in the early childhood classroom:

1. Early childhood is the optimum time of life for acquiring certain musical skills, most importantly the skills of singing in tune and learning to listen carefully and perceptively. These skills become progressively more and more difficult to acquire as one becomes older.

2. For the young child, music is one of the first and most natural vehicles of communication and self-expression. The infant babbles, vocalizes (partly in an effort to communicate, but more often for the sheer pleasure of it) long before he learns to talk. He experiments with producing sounds (kicking his[1] crib, banging on a high chair, banging blocks together, and so on) and repeats

[1]For the purpose of simplicity, I use the pronoun "he" to designate the child and "she" to designate the teacher. This is not meant to imply that all students are male or all teachers are female.

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those sounds he likes ad infinitum. Later he hums and sings to himself, accompanies repetitive activities with rhythmic chants or rhythmically recited nonsense chain of syllables or words. He responds to music by moving to the music with great abandon. He investigates musical instruments with great absorption - later his investigations lead him to produce patterns of increasing complexity and subtlety.

Thus, music is, or rather would be, one of man's most natural media of self-expression. And so it is among certain groups of people. However, in our Western middle class society, these channels of self-expression gradually dry up. As adults, few of us express our exultation by leaping through the air, our sorrow through plaintive songs, our anger in furious drum beats. Yet those of us who are fortunate enough to have retained some avenue for expressing and communicating our inner life know how crucially important these acts of self-expression are - this creation of something from within one's self.

We don't have to *teach* most children in the early childhood classes to express themselves through music, we merely have to nurture their natural proclivity for music by giving opportunities and encouragement to explore and by guiding them in their musical growth toward greater skill, breadth, complexity, and awareness of musical language.

The music program, like all education, should be built around the students' needs and capabilities. Accordingly, reflecting the dual musical needs of children discussed above, the music program should have the same dual goals, namely, (1) to teach skills best and most appropriately taught at a particular level, and (2) to nurture and give room for musical creativity and self-expression. (*See diagram, p.*44) I will now discuss in some detail the means of achieving these goals.

THE TEACHING OF SKILLS

As was mentioned above, the chief skill on which to concentrate in early childhood is the ability to sing in tune. If there are no physical malfunctions, this is a skill every child can achieve if properly taught. If we want to start our program "where the child is at", we need to examine what the general vocal characteristics of the child are.

It is now a well-established fact that the young child has a limited vocal range - located generally between middle C and A

PARALLEL GOALS OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD MUSIC PROGRAM

Skills

Task-centered

Goals: Learn to Sing in Tune

Activities: singing

Easy chant-like songs, small range, not too many leaps, repeated patterns, question-answer, roll call, using mi-so (f-d) later mi-so-la (f,d,g) melodies.

Goal: feel beat, rhythm

Activities: tap the beat while singing, clap rhythm of words, walk beat while singing, walk beat, clap rhythm, echo-clap simple patterns, question-answer rhythmic patterns, tap name, recognize song from clapped rhythm.

Ear-training, develop ability to listen with discernment:

recognize the sounds of classroom instruments, objects in environment, through movement, respond to moderate, fast, slow tempo, to high, low sounds, to soft, loud sounds, perceive same, different sounds or sections of a piece.

Self-Expression

Centered Around Expressive Needs

Goal: Nurture Creativity, Self-expression

Activity: The Music Corner
a stimulating environment with wide variety of instruments, with no restrictions on use of instruments - large blocks of uninterrupted time available for discovery of sound, improvisation, composition.

Teacher's Role:
Appreciator, nurturer, teach skills when needed, inspire growth through suggested projects (these suggestions sometimes may be for whole group, sometimes for individuals).

Goals: Learn to move freely, expressively; express feelings as well as musical concepts through movement.

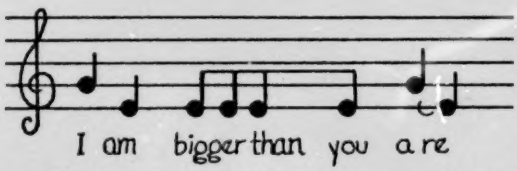
Activity: Expressive movement
Movement response to a large variety of truly great music. Include folk music, Western and non-Western, contemporary, electronic music, jazz, etc.

Teacher's Role:
Choose the best in recorded music. Let children's own music and interests guide choice of records to listen to. Use ideas gained from listening for suggestions for projects. Discuss musical concepts after child has already reacted to them through movement.

Unlike parallel lines, these parallel goals and activities constantly meet and interact.

above it.[2] For a long time, it was erroneously thought that children have "sweet high" voices. Although the "sweet high" theory is now widely rejected, many books compiled for young children are still full of songs which are written too high and the range of which is too big for them.

In their excellent work on music of the young, the researchers of the Pillsbury Foundation grouped the vocal productions of young children into two broad categories: the chant and the song.[3] The "chant" is a form of group or public singing. Children evolve these chants and sing them spontaneously together. Researchers found (as Kodaly and Orff also had found) that the most natural interval for children, the "universal chant of childhood", is the minor third: so-mi. The chant is highly repetitive. Extensive use is made of "reciting tones" in a way similar to the psalm tones used in Gregorian chant, the "message" being sung on a single note with an inflection at the beginning and at the end.



The rhythm either follows the rhythm of the words or is strongly repetitive.

The song, on the other hand, makes use of all melodic intervals, and the range may be quite large. It is not necessarily tonal; its rhythm is free and flexible:

> The child sings freely, especially when he is moving (on foot or on a wheel toy) in a high place (on the stage, a block pile, in the tree) and when he is playing quietly by himself. Song is essentially produced by the child for himself. It is not related to the group tempo (even when sung in counterpoint to group chanting); it is not repetitive in form; and even when the child repeats the same verbal phrase, he is apt to sing a different melody to it each time. These songs seem to be experimental in character,

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[2]Robert Smith, *Music in the Child's Education* (New York, N.Y.: Ronald Press Co., 1970), Ch. 2, The Early Childhood Vocal Program.

[3]Pillsbury Foundation, *Music of Young Children* (pamphlet), II, General Observations.

analogous to the child's earlier experiments with instrumental sound. They are experiments with melody. And we notice that whereas the form of the chant remains fixed, the child's songs change: as time goes on, the group chants basically are still as they were at first whereas the individual child's songs begin to assume personal characteristics. We have observed that this happens, and it would seem logical that it should happen; for it is necessary for group expressions, like group symbols, to maintain unvarying and immediately recognizable forms if they are to be potent and apt for communal use. The individual child, singing for himself, is subjected to no such necessity and so can change and develop his songs as he wishes."[4]

Group singing is obviously public singing; thus, it should take its point of departure from the "chant". It should be in a limited range, with many repeated patterns - rhythmic and melodic. The so-mi interval should be the basic most frequently used interval. The most logical sequence for vocal development has been worked out by exponents of the Kodaly method. Recently several volumes of songs for North American children have appeared. These are listed at the end of the article. In addition, the teacher can create her own material. It is quite simple to sing nursery rhymes on so-mi, later so-mi-la intervals. Calling the roll with these intervals is another excellent activity; it gives the teacher a chance to evaluate individual children's vocal development. A note of caution: if a child sings back in a range higher or lower than the one the teacher sang in, repeat the question in *his* range.

Singing should be sparsely, or not at all, accompanied. If unsure of herself, the teacher may play the melody on the piano or bells as she sings. Elaborate accompaniments make it difficult for the child to pick out the melody from the tonal barrage - it may make the singing appear much better than it actually is.

If the teacher follows the Kodaly sequence (progressing from so-mi to so-mi-la to mi-re-do to do-re-mi-so-la, etc.) of singing, her students will be singing songs predominantly in the pentatonic scale. It is quite unnecessary to force traditional major-minor chordal accompaniments on these songs. The teacher must remember that the major-minor harmonic system is not the only one of the many systems of tonal organization, even if it is a simple and most familiar one.

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[4]Pillsbury Foundation, *op. cit.*, p.13.

When the teacher does use an accompaniment instrument, the guitar or autoharp is preferable to the piano. It is less overpowering. It allows the teacher to sit on the floor with the children instead of towering above them, with her back to them. The autoharp is a simple, versatile instrument that children, too, can learn to play - both for accompaniment and in their own pieces.

A word about the "private" songs of children: although public or group singing should not be patterned on private singing, it is crucially important to nurture and encourage the latter. One simple way of doing this is by allowing the child to sing when and how he wishes. The child's private songs will typically not occur during "music time". He will sing while moving around, while reading or painting. The teacher must realize that when music is a vital channel of self-expression, it is enmeshed in life and must not be separated by artificial barriers like scheduling. Teachers who have worked in open classrooms know how quickly students and teachers adjust to the higher noise level which such freedom of expression will create. The child singing to himself in a corner is far less distracting to other children than the teacher constantly pleading for quiet.

It is also important to praise children for their original songs - invite them to share their song with the rest of the class or teach it to them. The teacher might offer to tape the child's song. Encouragement should never invade privacy. If the child is embarrassed by being overheard, the teacher should respect the child's desire for privacy.

A third important way of encouraging the private song is by allowing the child to listen to music which has musical characteristics similar to his own music. His song is often atonal, rhythmically free and flexible, often jagged, with large leaps. Two large categories of music have some of these characteristics: contemporary music and early or non-Western music.

The teacher, alas, may not enjoy the music of Schoenberg, Berg, Webern, Bartok, Cage, Boulez, Crumb, Feldman, Berio (to name a few contemporary composers whose vocal music children might enjoy), but that is no reason for depriving children from exposure to all this music. Who knows, the teacher may learn to hear the music through the childrens' ears and learn to like it.

It has been said that the child's development recapitulates the development of the human race. Children enjoy and identify with so-called "primitive" music. Interestingly, you will note how group singing will resemble children's chant while solo singing's free flow resembles and shares characteristics with the

child's private song. The instruments used to accompany much of this singing will resemble the child's own accompaniment instrument, heavily relying on clapping and percussion instruments.

Folk music, like the child's music, is enmeshed in life. It is not an experience reserved for special times only, but arises from and accompanies daily life - work, the hunt, religious festivities. A word of caution about the word "primitive": it has, unfortunately, a pejorative connotation of backwardness. No one who has listened to the breath-taking complexity of African drums or the mysterious quality of Japanese temple music could possibly describe these as simple or backward.

The teacher who is to nurture children's musicality must develop an appreciation of all music. If her notion of what is music is limited to Western tonal music produced during the 18th and 19th centuries, she will not be able to appreciate children's music, which more closely resembles "primitive" and contemporary music.

Next to vocal development, the most important area of skill development is the development of aural perceptiveness. Two aspects must be considered when training the child's ear. One is to train the child to really listen. As we adapt to our environment, one of the things we learn to do is to shut out stimuli which do not seem relevant. This is a necessary process, for if we were constantly aware of all the stimuli bombarding our senses, we would be driven mad. Yet in the process of learning to cope with all these stimuli, our senses become generally sluggish. Rather than allowing all our senses to become dull, we should learn to selectively focus on a given stimulus - becoming aware of all the aspects, the nuances of this one stimulus. Asking children to shut their eyes and listen to all the sounds in the room is an excellent exercise. Playing first one, then a succession of two notes on any instruments and asking children to tell you all they can about the notes is another excellent exercise.

The second aspect of ear-training involves raising to a conscious level knowledge that is already part of a child on a subconscious level. Children who have been experimenting with sounding objects (instruments) know that different sounding bodies produce different sounds, that different ways of hitting or plucking the same object also produce different sounds. The teacher needs to make such subconscious knowledge conscious and organized. Children should recognize the sounds of classroom instruments and sounds of their environment. They should be able to classify sounds according to the manner of sound production and, listening to records of unfamiliar instruments, recognize whether the instrument is a wind, string, or percussion instrument.

Children also instinctively "feel the beat", the rhythm of music. Through walking the beat while singing, walking the beat and clapping the rhythm of a song, reacting to the tempo of a piece through movement, echo-clapping short rhythmic patterns, recognizing a song by its clapped rhythm, children can become conscious of rhythmic elements. A child's most natural response to music is through movement. This desire to move should be respected and utilized by the teacher. Rather than asking for verbal responses, the teacher should ask for movement responses to show awareness of such musical concepts as tempo, rhythm, dynamics, melodic contour, change of timbre, and repetition of musical ideas.

SELF-EXPRESSION

By now it is apparent to the reader that, even though I have been discussing means to achieve skill-oriented goals, much relating to self-expressive aspects of music has already crept into the discussion. This is unavoidable since the two goals (skills and self-expression) are part of one unified music program whose separate components constantly interact.

Below follows a more detailed discussion of ways of achieving the second goal, namely, nurturing music as a creative, self-expressive medium. A quote from the Pillsbury study best summarizes the child's needs in this area:

> To produce his own music, a young child's first need, we find, is freedom - freedom to move about in pursuit of his own interests and purposes, and freedom to make the sounds appropriate to them. He needs to be allowed to set up his own sort of society with adult help only where needed. He should be provided with materials and be given experiences which will enrich his living. He needs technical help in gaining skills, but this should be given only when he shows readiness and need for it, and therefore we keep it always secondary and sensitive to his own urge for expression and growth.[5]

The most effective way to provide the child with materials for exploration and creation is to set up a music center. This center should be available to the child who wants to avail himself of it, for fairly long, undisturbed periods of time.

The music center or corner should be furnished with a variety

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[5]Pillsbury Foundation, *op. cit.*, p.5.

of instruments. It is important to buy instruments with good musical qualities. The traditional rhythm band set is seldom a bargain. It would be far better to buy a good tambourine, cymbols, xylophone, and autoharp. The teacher, pupils, and parents can make the rest of the instruments. In my course for prospective teachers, one of the assignments I give is to invent and construct an original instrument. The wealth of beautiful-looking, beautiful-sounding instruments which are turned in at the end of the semester is a constant reminder that one need not spend a fortune to obtain beautiful instruments.

In buying or constructing instruments, one ought to keep in mind four factors: the instrument should be fairly sturdy, should look attractive, have a musical sound, and afford many opportunities for exploration. The last quality is very important. There should be many ways of producing sounds with every instrument. Obviously the teacher must never "demonstrate" how an instrument should be played. That is one of the important discoveries for the child to make. In addition to "musical instruments", the children should be encouraged to bring other interesting sounds to contribute to the music corner.

The role of the teacher, when the child is working by himself or with classmates in the music center, is that of an observer, appreciator, and helper - when help is needed. How and when should the teacher help? If a child appears to be bored or aimless, the teacher may set him a problem to solve: "Can you arrange all these instruments from highest to lowest?" or "Can you try making very soft sounds?" She may clap a simple rhythmic pattern and ask him to play it back, or she may have a "musical conversation" with the child. By musical conversation I mean an activity where the teacher and child choose an array of instruments and compose a piece of music together.

In addition to these individual activities, there are group activities whose benefits will result in growth. The effects of these group activities may be observed in the quality of the child's work in the music center.

One of the first sources of fascination for the child is in tone color. The teacher should encourage children to find as many sounds as possible. "How else could you play the drum?" (rub the mallet on the head, on the side, scrape with fingernails, drop marbles on it, etc.). Keep asking for newer and newer ways - encourage the child to go beyond the obvious. At all times, the teacher should encourage careful listening. Did the children discover scraping, rubbing, on the drum? Now let's see if they can recognize these sounds with their eyes closed - for example, can the children

discover that different mallets make different sounds on the drum? Now let them recognize the mallet being used with their eyes closed.

Let children discover the sounds of the environment. Go for "aural walks" - collect all the sounds heard in a field, a city street, the school yard. Listen to the sounds in the classroom when everything is seemingly silent. Were the sounds high, low, short, long? Was there a rhythmic pattern - could they clap the pattern (for example, footsteps moving past the room)?

Ask children to discover all the sounds they can produce with paper, with water. Try a group composition of all paper sounds. Decide on such questions as, "How should we start, soft or loud, everyone playing together or one person beginning; should we get louder, softer, faster, slower?" Such questions make children consciously aware of basic compositional devices - seeking unity, contrast, ways to achieve or release tension. When you listen to children's improvisations, you realize that children often instinctively know how to achieve tension-release, unity-contrast, and so on.

The authors of the Pillsbury Foundation Report hypothesize that many of the child's rhythmic improvisations have their bases in physical activity. Thus, a little pattern with a crescendo, accelerando - climax (perhaps a loud whack on the drum) followed by a short decelerando - may have its origin in a physical activity such as running, gathering momentum, jumping up, falling and landing on the ground. Thus, many so-called compositional devices might have their origin in muscular movements common to most children. And so these compositional devices would not be foreign or esoteric to the child. However, he needs to become consciously aware of them if he is to grow in sophistication so that he can use these devices to express himself in more complex and subtle ways.

Imitating compositional devices heard on records is another excellent way of growing in expressive possibilities. For example, after moving to jazz recordings, children should note the alternation of solo-chorus sections. This might help young children who are initially very uncooperative about improvising in a group (often each child tries to drown out everyone else). The solo-chorus alternation allows individual outbursts after group playing. The child is also challenged to play his most exciting patterns during his solo. Listening to gradual build-ups followed by gradual decline is another good pattern for children to imitate in group composition. This encourages careful listening - each child has to be aurally aware of what is going on (is everyone crescendoing, have we reached the climax, are we getting softer?).

Listening to a recording of African drum music, the children I

worked with this year picked up and imitated the structure of that piece. First, each performer plays his repeating pattern individually, then all these patterns are added together into one exciting, highly complex texture.

The possibilities are endless. The teacher will find that if she listens perceptively, asking herself, "How is this piece put together?", she will be able to come up with many such structural suggestions from the records the children are listening to.

The teacher can also introduce musical concepts as inspiration for group improvisation. For example, children can be asked to experiment with their shortest and longest possible sounds, vocal as well as instrumental. It is a good idea to combine this activity with movement - letting children move and sing their shortest-longest movements-sounds simultaneously. Then let them improvise a piece, alternating sections of short-long sounds-movements.

Concepts of different textures (solo, unison, solo with accompaniment, counterpoint) are other good sources for improvisational suggestions. Here, too, movement and musical improvisation should be done together.

Musical activities often happen outside the music period and music center. As has been suggested, singing often happens when the child is engaged in other activities or just sitting quietly. The puppet corner is another likely place for musical creativity to happen, especially if some musical instruments are casually included with other props. The teacher who puts a few musical instruments in the puppet corner might be very pleasantly surprised to find that instead of just drama, grand opera is now taking place there.

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IN SUMMARY, it should be reiterated that the child, if his creativity is to be nurtured, needs an environment rich both in materials and experiences. The teacher, for her part, must respect the child's needs and desires. She must not measure the success of the child's musical achievements by her own standards of what is "good music" - this standard is very often derived from knowledge and appreciation of one very narrow segment of the world's music (18th-19th century Western music). She must realize that it is the learning-creative process which her students are undergoing, and that quality and quantity of these processes are important, and *not* some final product (for example, a Christmas concert of rhythm band and singing).

FOR FURTHER READING

On Kodaly Method:

Choksy, Lois, *The Kodaly Method*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1974 (included are 158 excellent folk songs of North America - for children).

On Expressive Movement:

Landis, Beth, "Movement and Music" in *The Eclectic Curriculum of American Education*, M.E.N.C.

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Suggestions for Creative Projects:

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Schafer, R. Murray, *When Words Sing*. 1970. Available from Berandol Music Ltd., 651 Progress Avenue, Scarborough, Ontario.

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Paynter, John, and Peter Aston, *Sound and Silence: Classroom Projects in Creative Music*. Cambridge, England, 1970.

Song Collections:

Choksy, c.f. Kodaly Method, above.

Smith, Leonhard, *Discovering Music Together*. Early Childhood Volume, Follet Pub.

13